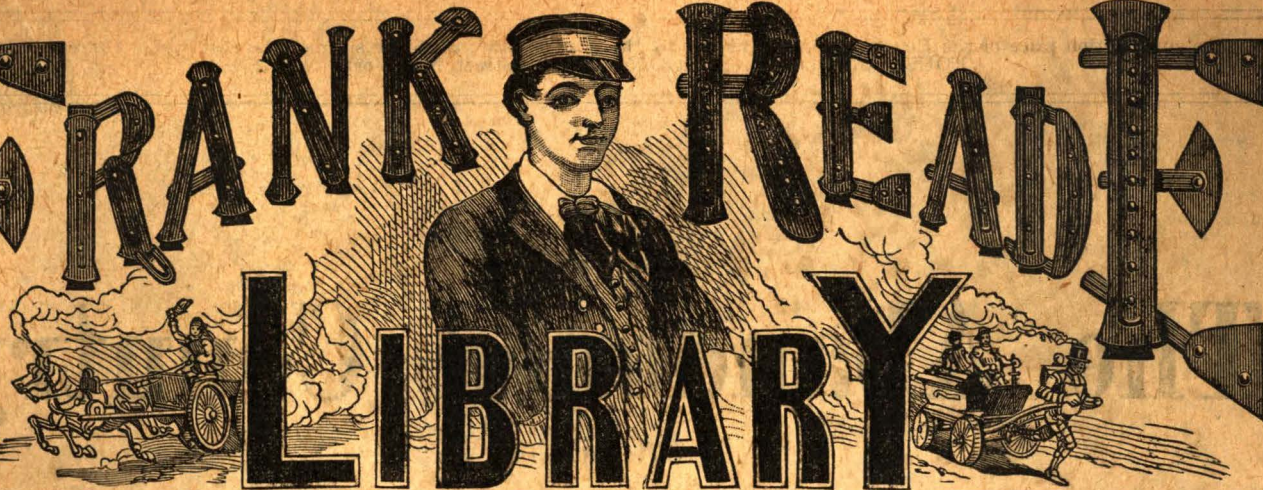


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The Abandoned Country;

or, Frank Reade, Jr., Exploring
a New Continent.

By "NONAME."



It was Wendel who saved the day. He luckily had his rifle with him. Rushing forward he placed it at the bear's head and fired point blank. The ball crashed through bruin's brain and ended the struggle. Frank detached himself from the brute's embrace.

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The Abandoned Country;

OR,

FRANK READE, JR., EXPLORING A NEW CONTINENT.

A RECORD OF WONDERFUL INCIDENTS.

By "NONAME,"

Author of "The Weird Island," "The Transient Lake," "The Lost Caravan," "The Sunken Isthmus," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

A WONDERFUL TALE.

"So you think the earth has been thoroughly explored and that there is no such thing as an undiscovered continent, do you?" asked Percy Randall, as he lit a cigar and seated himself comfortably in a chair in the office of Frank Reade, Jr. for a social chat.

The young inventor, who hardly needs an introduction to the reader, so well is he known the world over, turned from his desk and regarded his visitor with a quizzical smile.

"Still at that old theory, Randall?" he said. "I thought you had discarded it after that last expedition of yours."

Randall, a bronzed, athletic man of thirty years, but heaps of experience as a globe trotter and explorer, winced, but replied lightly:

"Well, I did have a hard time. We lost our ship in Desolation Channel, and were forced to take to an ice-berg. If we had had an overland machine like your Electric Scorchers, we could have easily crossed that ice barrier, and set foot upon the new continent, the most wonderful part of the globe. But as it was we were carried north into Cape Horn waters on the berg and finally picked up by an Argentine vessel."

Frank looked interested.

"Then you really believe that there is an inhabited and undiscovered continent beyond that ice barrier?" he asked.

"Why, I have old Jack Wendel's word for it!"

"A sailor's word is good except when connected with a story. The telling of a yarn is ample license for stretching the imagination."

"Very good!" rejoined Randall, "but old Jack has given his davy on it, and all sorts of oaths. Oh, I firmly believe him."

"I would much like to hear his story," said Frank.

"You would?" asked Randall, eagerly.

"Yes!"

"Then you shall. I brought him here to-day for that purpose. He is just outside the door. I will call him."

Randall opened the office door and called:

"Wendel, come in here!"

The next moment there appeared in the doorway the figure of a sailor, of the old time type, who spliced the main-brace and made sennit in the forecabin in the palmy days of "tea wagons" and seventy-four gun frigates.

Jack Wendel pulled his foretop respectfully before Frank, and said:

"With submission, sir, just come aboard, and at your service!"

"Glad to meet you, sir!" said Frank, warmly, "sit down. My friend here tells me that you have a wonderful yarn to tell."

Wendel shot a shrewd glance at Frank, then said:

"It is not a yarn, skipper. It is a true story, on my honor."

"Very good," said Frank. "I should be glad to have you repeat it to me."

Wendel looked at Randall, who said:

"Certainly, Jack—fire away."

The old salt clasped his hands over his knees and began:

"It was in '53, and I went out from Baltimore in the Mary Luce, Captain Barnaby, for Peru. There never was a stauncher ship, mates, nor the Luce. She stood up like a church in a running gale, and it was no light storm that put her under the rollers."

"Well, we were forty-three souls aboard—crew, officers, and a few passengers. We had a lucky voyage all the way across the Equator, and down the coast until we struck their Horn seas. Then there was the Old Harry to pay."

"We hit into a south storm, and for four days we were unable to tell where we were. The seas came aboard like avalanches and cleared the deck to the masts fore and aft. That was a little the toughest trip I ever had. And I haven't forgotten it."

"Well, the way the wind did howl and the sea run. When at length the sun shone long enough to take an observation our skipper swore that we were south of the Antarctic Circle."

"And with that our bo'sun's mate came up to say that the ship was leaking a hundred strokes a minute more or less. We all turned to the pumps and worked like mad men."

"But what was the use? We could never hope to make land under many weeks and the ship could not float that long. We were put to it pretty desperate and finally the end came."

"There was no way but to take to the boats. What was worse a little squall came up and made it almost impossible to launch 'em. Then the ship began to settle."

"I can't tell ye jest all about what followed. The captain's boat was lowered and swamped. The long-boat cleared with fourteen aboard but was caught between the rollers and capsized. All hands went down."

"There was over twenty of us left on the ship's deck, and a regular fight was made for the remaining boats. They were put out and two of 'em got clear and made off. But whatever became of 'em nobody ever knew. Six of us were left behind, and we had given ourselves up for lost."

"But the ship water-logged and did not sink as soon as it was thought that she would. That gave us time to make a raft. We put some stores on it, and set out in a calmer sea. For six weeks we floated in those icy seas."

"Luckily for us it was the Antarctic summer, and we managed to get along with our thin clothing until we suddenly hailed land. Yes, it was actually land, away beyond the icebergs."

"There were mountains and a smoking volcano. At once our boys were decided to pay it a visit."

"The raft drifted on into the edge of the ice floe. Then we left her and cut out across the ice field."

"It would take a long time for me to tell ye all that happened us on that long walk. One of our men slid into an air-hole and we never saw him again."

"Another died of exhaustion. But we kept on, though the cold was something awful to bear, until at last we came to a cut in the

shore line. It was the mouth of a big river, and was jammed full of ice.

"It looked like a clear country beyond. We saw fir forests and evidences of a game country. So we pushed on over the ice packs in the river.

"For fifty miles we followed the course of that icy river between fearful mountains and through deep gorges. At length we noticed a peculiar warmth in the atmosphere, and one of our boys, sniffing the air, declared:

"On my word, mates, I can smell land!"

"And, in fact, we could. The awful chill of the ice world was gone. Hope revived in our breast. We kept on, and the further we went the more evidences we found of the existence of a land clear from ice.

"At length we came to clear, open places in the river. Water was visible. There were bare patches of shore and hillside.

"The soil was auriferous, and we found slight evidences of minerals. Now a warm breeze relaxed our stiffened muscles, and removed the tension from our lungs. We pressed on.

"A few days later we left the ice region behind us entirely, and came upon the wonderful Polar country. I couldn't begin to describe it all to ye, mates; but it was unlike any other part of the earth.

"Well, we wandered around for six months. It was easy to live there, for there was plenty of game. In the valleys were cities and towns, and at a distance we saw the Polar people. These are not to be classed with the Esquimaux, and seemed quite equal to Europeans of the lower class.

"But we were not sure of a warm reception, so we did not venture to make their acquaintance. We kept out of sight in the hills.

"Well, we lived a year in the Polar country. We liked the life, but after awhile we tired of it, as sailors will. Jim Welch wanted to go back to his wife in old Salem; Rod Smith had a sweetheart in Buzzards' Bay, and Jack Olson had promised his mother to stay at home with her after this voyage.

"So we figured out our position. We knew that in April the ice fields would move north. Many of the big bergs would drift nearly to the Equator. We decided to make our way to one and take our chances on being picked up by a ship.

"So we made us suits of fur. Then we traveled down the river to the coast again.

"Here we found a big berg in a good position and made us a camp on it. We dug a deep cache and filled it with frozen meat and fowls. We dipped fresh water from small wooden troughs set in top of the berg which filled with water the first rain.

"When the proper time came the berg began to drift out to sea. Then we got into the Equatorial Drift. It was a rough and strange experience.

"For months we lived on the berg watching every day for a sail. Day by day the warm waters licked the ice away until all that was left of the big ice structure was about an acre in area. Then we knew that a great danger threatened us.

"One day Jim Welch with a white face came out, and said:

"Did ye feel that shiver in the berg a moment ago, lads? I tell ye she'll turn turtle before two days."

"You know that all bergs after melting to a certain point will grow top heavy and turn over. That would settle our case. And yet no sail.

"But the next morning at sunrise a Venezuela schooner lay off our lee. The Gringo skipper answered our hail and took us off. He carried us to Caraccas and we then shipped for New York.

"We were glad to get home and none of us wanted to go back. But we could say that we had visited a part of the world that was never explored.

"And in that light we felt as big as Columbus, for there's no telling what may some day come of the discovery when trade is opened up. And that, mates, is the whole of my story!"

CHAPTER II.

PLANS ARE MADE.

WITH this the sailor arose, touched his cap, and started for the door. But Frank, who had listened with the most intense of interest, said:

"Wait! do not go yet, Jack. I may want to ask you some questions."

"At your service, skipper!"

"Well," said Randall, triumphantly, "what do you think of it now, Frank?"

"I own that I am much interested," replied the young inventor, "it is a remarkable tale and a valuable discovery!"

"So I believe," cried Randall, "here is evidence of the existence of a new and undiscovered continent. What better field could a man want?"

"How is it, Wendel?" asked the young inventor, turning to the sailor, "could my Electric Scorchers travel easily through that region?"

"Ay, sir, I believe it could after ye left the ice behind!" replied the sailor.

Frank knit his brows.

"How great a distance would we have to travel over the ice fields?" he asked.

"Not over one hundred miles."

"I have a plan," said the young inventor. "I can attach my new skate shoes with the ice crank to the wheels. That would enable us to cross the ice, and we can remove them when we strike land."

An ecstatic cry escaped Randall's lips.

"Oh, then you really think of going?" he cried. "That is splendid, Frank. It will be a wonderful experience."

"Ah, but I have not promised absolutely," said the young inventor, quickly. "But I will say this, that I will think the matter over seriously."

"Only think of the glory of the thing."

"That is true; but the feasibility of the enterprise must be strongly considered. You have tried it—"

"And failed. But you see, Frank, I had not the resources which you have, the fertile brain for devising expedients, and the Electric Scorchers."

Frank turned and pressed a small call bell. The door opened, and a negro black as soot appeared.

"Pomp," said Frank, "where is Barney?"

"Dat l'ishman, sah? He am jes' outside, sah," replied the coon, with a duck of the head.

"Call him in. I want to see both of you."

"All right, sah!"

A moment later a shock-headed native of the Emerald Isle appeared with the dorky. These two men were Frank Reade, Jr.'s most faithful colleagues and companions in many a wonderful voyage.

"Wud yez loike to see me, sor?" asked Barney, with a scrape.

"I want to ask you if you have put the supplies aboard the Scorchers yet?"

Both bowed.

"Shure an' we have, sor!"

"It am all ready, Marse Frank!"

"Good enough!" said Frank, in a pleased tone. "I have news for you. Mr. Randall and his friend have told me of a wonderful country beyond the Antarctic Circle which I think of paying a visit to. In that case it will not be long before we shall leave Readestown upon a new and wonderful voyage!"

Barney gave a cry of delight and turned a flip-flap. Pomp cut a pigeon wing.

"Golly, golly, dat am jes' fine!"

"Bejabbers, I'm glad of it!"

"Now, be off, both of you," commanded Frank, "and get the machine all ready for the start."

Away scurried the two jokers, and Frank turned to his companions with a smile.

"They will leave nothing undone," he said. "We are practically all ready to start at once."

"That is good," cried Randall. "Frank, you are a rusher!"

"Of course you will be one of our party?" asked Frank.

"Delighted, and—"

Randall looked toward Wendel. "Of course we shall have to include your friend, if he will consent to go."

Wendel pulled his foretop, and replied:

"At your service, skipper! I didn't think I'd ever ship for that latitude again, but I'm with ye!"

All shook hands.

The compact was made.

They were about to undertake what seemed an herculean task, namely, the paying of a visit to an unexplored and comparatively inaccessible part of the world. What chances there were against them could easily be enumerated.

There was the possibility of never emerging from the deadly ice floes, where the temperature was so fearful low as to militate against human life. Wild beasts and wilder inhabitants were only a few of the perils.

But Frank Reade, Jr., was not the one to take backward steps once he assumed an undertaking.

"Now," he said briskly "let us get down to business. We must first consider the means of getting to the Antarctic with the Scorchers."

"Very good," said Randall. "Can you suggest a plan?"

Wendel here pulled his foretop and said respectfully:

"With respect to my superiors, sir, I think I can give ye a trick at the proper course."

Frank and Randall turned.

"Very well," said Frank pleasantly, "we will be glad to hear it."

"I have a friend—a former shipmate," said Wendel, "who owns a staunch brig—just such a vessel as can stand the rough winds and the ice. His ship lies in New Bedford harbor now. His name is Captain Isaac Ward, and the name of his ship is the Black Pearl. He would, I think, undertake the voyage without any doubt."

"Good!" cried Frank with alacrity, "how soon can we see him and where?"

"I will wire him now!" said Randall, excitedly. "If we can charter his brig we shall be all right."

A few moments later a telegraph message was speeding on its way to New Bedford. An hour later an answer came:

"FRANK READE, JR., Readestown.

"Dear sir:—My brig is in commission and ready for a cruise. I will agree to reasonable terms and will be in Readestown to-morrow.

"Yours hastily,

"ISAAC WARD."

All that the adventurers could do now was to wait for the coming of Captain Ward. Frank arose from the desk, and said:

"Would not you gentlemen like to take a look at the Scorcher?"
 "Delighted," was Randall's reply, and Wendel nodded eagerly. So they left the office with this purpose in view.

When Barney and Pomp went forth they were in hilarious spirits. They crossed the yard with a hop, skip and jump and approached the heavy iron doors of a high, truss-roofed structure.

"Ki yi!" cried Pomp clicking his heels together. "I jes' 'lot on seeing dem ice-bergs. Huh! dat be a berry good place fo' yo', I'ish."

"Phwat do yez mane, naygur?" interrogated Barney.

"Bekase it am so cold."

"Phwat has that to do wid me, yez grinning misfit av an ape?"

"Hi, hi, hi! don' yo' know? Ice am a'right fo' to preserve green fings."

Barney made a biff at Pomp.

"Be me sowl, it'll make yez more conspicuous fer yer color, naygur!" he cried. "Shure ye'll frighten the whole country."

"Huh! reckon dere am brack men in all pahts ob de worl'."

"Divil a wan will yez foind on the old sod."

"Dat am a berry unfortunate fings fo' de island," retorted Pomp. "Ki dar, look out fo' dat big snai!"

The darky simulated terror and pointed to the Celt's feet. Of course, there was no snake there, but the exclamation caused Barney to leap and yell with terror.

When he saw how he had been sold he made an angry biff at Pomp.

"Begorra, I'll have yer skhin fer that!" he yelled.

But Pomp put out his foot and tripped the Celt up. However, Barney caught the darky's ankle and brought him down, too.

Then there followed a mix-up. For a time it was hard to tell which had the best of it.

But suddenly approaching footsteps and voices were heard.

"Whisht!" cried Barney, "that's Mistor Frank. Be off wid yez."

And they scurried away just in time. Frank with his visitors came up and opened the big doors. There upon a small platform stood the new invention.

The Electric Scorcher was built for speed, and with an idea to economy of space and lightness. It weighed hardly a thousand pounds, but on its pneumatic tired wheels ran apparently as light as an ordinary bicycle.

The symmetry of its build and the grace of its contour was remarkable. In these was seen the master hand of the builders and the mechanics.

The body of the Scorcher was made of bullet proof plates of steel. It rested upon light but strong running rear. There were four plate glass windows upon each side and one in the rear.

Above the deck rose a structure of steel netting—a sort of cage in which the voyagers could remain with unimpeded view in all directions. In this cage there were loopholes for firing upon a foe, if such a thing as defense should become necessary.

Over this cage was a small deck, and upon it was mounted a long, light steel cylinder. This was Frank Reade, Jr.'s most wonderful invention—the pneumatic dynamite electric gun.

This was a very deadly weapon, capable of throwing a dynamite shell two miles with frightful effect.

Just forward of this cage was the pilot house, with heavy plate glass windows. The rear of the Scorcher was graced with a steel hood—much like the top of a chase. In this there were kept the dynamos and electric engines.

In the pilot house was a keyboard by which the machine could be regulated and operated. Over the pilot house was a powerful searchlight with a wide range.

The equipments and furnishings of the machine throughout were of the best, and there were stores aboard sufficient for a year's journey. Nothing had been left undone.

The Electric Scorcher was quite ready for the trip.

The two visitors looked the machine over with wonderment and delight. Then they went back to the office where final arrangements were made.

And thus was undertaken the remarkable feat of making a voyage to an undiscovered continent.

It was an arduous and perilous undertaking, but our adventurers were pledged to it, and what their success was we shall see.

CHAPTER III.

IN SOUTHERN SEAS.

AND now, with the reader's permission, we will change the scene of our story to the high seas south of the Equator.

The Black Pearl, staunch brig, was plowing her way through a white-capped sea. Unusually good weather had favored the party thus far.

There had been no difficulty encountered with the doldrums or head winds even, and the Pearl had made a quick passage.

The sun was fiercely hot, and they were yet able to realize that they were in the tropics. But they knew that every hour now brought them nearer to their destination.

On the deck a canopy had been erected, and under this all were fond of reclining.

The principal pastime was of discussing the probable results of the trip and the peculiarities of the Antarctic land.

As near as Frank could figure, the fiord or river outlet, by means of which Wendel and his companions had entered the Antarctic country, was off the coast of Graham Land.

In that case a course due south from Cape Horn would be pretty sure to bring them into the right locality. So the brig held that course.

The arrangement was that Captain Ward should land them as near the Antarctic coast as possible on the ice field.

Then he would return to Montevideo and remain four months, after which he would come back to the edge of the ice field and cruise about for a month.

Finding no signs of the voyagers then he would go back to Montevideo for two months more, thence returning to the ice pack for a month.

After three such attempts, consuming about a year in time, he would then be assured that the adventurers would not come out alive, and he could go wherever his fancy dictated.

This was the plan.

Frank had chartered the Pearl and crew for one year, paying them a liberal bonus, for the voyage was a more arduous one than the ordinary.

There were eighteen men in the crew, all plucky and hardy fellows who were ready to fight at command.

Captain Ward was intensely interested in the project of exploring the Antarctic Continent and more than once hinted at a desire to leave his ship and accompany the Scorcher's party.

But our adventurers took great pains not to encourage such a thing, for there were already enough in the party.

As is usually the case the fore-castle also got hold of the matter and the result was that a pretty yarn was soon going the rounds.

This was to the effect that there were fabulous gold mines back of the great ice belt, and that the voyagers were bound thither to work the newly discovered mines.

Now if there is one thing which will inflame the minds of lawless men it is the yellow metal.

At once a thrill of excitement ran through the ship.

The fever was on and it had a lamentable and disastrous effect upon the sailors.

They neglected their duties and crowded in secret knots about the ship. Look into the eyes of one of them and there you would see the demon of avarice, the haunting, restless spirit of gain and greed.

Of course such a state of affairs as this could not help but be bad for the ship and all on board.

Frank was the first to notice it, and said to Randall:

"I am afraid that idea is going to make trouble. Even the captain has the foolish fancy."

"You are right," agreed Randall, "and it has worried me not a little. What ought we to do about it?"

"Is there any way in which we can dispel the illusion?"

"I can think of no way save to call them to quarters and have the captain tell them what the real errand of the Scorcher is."

"Will they believe it?"

"Perhaps not; but I see no other way."

"Very well."

So Randall held a consultation with Captain Ward, and the result was that the men were called aft and lectured.

The mission of the Scorcher was enlarged upon, but even as he berated his crew it could be seen that the captain was not himself convinced.

Frank shook his head ominously at this.

"I am afraid that trouble will come out of it all," he said.

Below the Tropic of Capricorn the weather grew cooler and more rapid progress was made.

One day some islands were sighted off to the southwest. Captain Ward closed his glass, and said:

"The Falklands, gentlemen. Do you wish to stop there awhile?"

"No!" replied Frank, emphatically; "let us get into southern waters as quickly as possible."

"Aye, aye, sir!"

Straight southward the brig held her way. But progress now was slow.

They encountered rough seas and heavy storms. For weeks the brig fought her way through mountain rollers, until at last somewhat battered she sighted distant land.

The captain consulted his chart, and said:

"I reckon that is Graham Land. But there are fifty miles of ice floes this side of it. Perhaps, though, we can find a channel for the brig."

Down among the ice floes the Pearl sailed. It was difficult work, but after many days of struggling she anchored in a little lagoon in the ice field and not ten miles from the coast.

And Wendel pointed to a distant break in the coast and cried:

"There is the fiord or river mouth up which we steered!"

This caused intense excitement. Preparations were at once begun for unloading the Scorcher.

The sections of the machine were taken off upon the ice pack. Then Barney and Pomp went to work to put it together.

In a short space the machine was all ready for the start. All this while the captain and his men had stood by eagerly watching.

The captain had asked Frank many questions, all of which the young inventor had thought it no harm to answer.

At length the adventurers went aboard the Scorcher and all was ready for the start. The ice shoes had been fitted to the wheels, which were in turn trigged with chains.

Under each wheel was a sharp cog arrangement which struck into the ice and thus propelled the Scorcher over the smooth surface or the clinging snow. And thus the start was made.

Frank and his companions had shaken hands with the captain, and the young inventor said:

"I suppose you will soon be on your way to Montevideo, Mr. Ward. You will need to make haste to avoid getting shut up in the ice pack for the coming winter."

"I will look out for that!" replied Ward almost stiffly.

Then the Scorchers glided slowly away across the ice field leaving the brig yet in the little ice-bound basin.

The progress across the ice field was by no means easy.

There were sections of it where the ice cakes had crashed together and made long mounds or high barriers. Sometimes these were fifty feet or more in height.

It was necessary often to make a smooth road over or through these barriers and this took much time. The light of the waning Antarctic day was none too bright.

But steadily our adventurers drew nearer to the mighty cliffs and headlands, which opened to create the deep fiord.

The trip, however, was not without incident, for just as they were skirting a high pinnacle of ice, it cracked, crumbled, and fell.

The descending avalanche fortunately did not fall squarely upon the Scorchers, else the result might have been serious.

It instead massed itself about the machine, and half buried it. For a time the adventurers were in a virtual panic.

But as soon as the crashing ice settled into place, Frank sprung out of the pilot house and began to examine the running gear of the machine.

"How is it?" asked Randall; "has anything smashed?"

"Nothing," replied Frank, joyfully. "I feared the worst."

"I thought we were doomed."

"So did I, but thanks to Providence we are all right."

"Save for the ice!"

"Hang me for a whale," exploded Wendel, "I don't see how we'll ever squirm out of this, mates!"

"Well, you shall see," said Frank. "Barney and Pomp, here's work for us. Let all hands fall in."

In a few moments all had doffed their fur garments and were working like beavers.

The ice was cleared from the deck after twenty minutes of hard work. Then Frank hit upon an idea.

He went into the pilot-house and brought out a number of heavy wires.

"What are you going to do, Frank?" asked Randall.

"Wait and you will see," said the young inventor, vaguely.

"I will do so," agreed Randall. "I suppose it is as good as settled that we are out of here without further effort?"

"Don't be so sure."

"Oh, you never fail. If I had half your resource and inventive faculty, I would be a king among men."

"Pshaw!" said Frank, testily, "don't talk nonsense!"

Over the ice heap the young inventor went with the wires. Then he brought out small dynamite cartridges and placed at the end of each wire. It was now that Randall clearly saw his purpose.

"Will not the explosion injure the machine?" he asked.

"It is not sufficient in quantity," replied Frank; "if it was in mass it might, but such small charges will only shake the ice to powder. Once we can clear it away from the wheels we are all right."

However, the voyagers watched Frank's work with some anxiety as well as interest. After awhile it was completed.

Then the young inventor connected the wires with the dynamos. A touch of the electric button and the charge was off.

There was quite a sharp explosion.

A quantity of loose ice shot up into the air, and the whole mass gradually settled lower.

The huge cakes were split and riven in twain, and made easier to handle. As they were now clearing them away Barney gave a sharp cry.

He picked up a block of ice in which was imbedded a man's skull. It was a hideous looking object.

CHAPTER IV.

UP THE FIORD.

In an instant all were crowded about the Celt, and interested in his strange discovery.

"Shure, phwereiver did this poor sowl come from?" cried the Celt. "Shure he must have died here!"

"Golly! did yo' ebber see de beat ob dat?" cried Pomp, in amazement.

"A human skull!" ejaculated Randall. "How is it, Frank? Is not that proof that these frozen latitudes are inhabited?"

"It is proof that they have been visited before by man," agreed Frank. "It looks like the skull of a civilized man."

"And so it is, mates," cried Wendel. "Now I remember when we crossed this ice field John Morgan, one of our men, died and we buried him here in the ice. I reckon that is his skull."

"The mystery explained," cried Randall; "but where is the rest of the body?"

"That question is readily answered," replied Frank. "The constant shifting of the ice may have disintegrated the body and distributed parts of it everywhere. Lively now, and let's get the machine clear. Time is valuable."

Ten minutes later the Scorchers glided out of its bed of ice and crossed the high line of ice blocks to the smooth ice field beyond.

"All aboard!" cried Frank.

The rest of the way to the coast was easy traveling. Then the mouth of the fiord was entered.

It was the gateway to the unknown world of the Antarctic, and it need hardly be said that all in the party were intensely interested.

High up on the rocky steep of the fiord snow-burdened firs hung over the abyss. At times a bear or a fox might be seen among the icy rocks.

Great flocks of penguins and other water fowl were in evidence. There was an abundance of game.

The Scorchers soon came to a long, level reach of smooth ice. Over this the machine sped with ease.

Miles flew by, and soon the snow-burdened region began to unfold itself.

Wendel suddenly pointed to a distant range of mighty mountains and declared:

"Look ye, mates! Beyond that range is the new continent. Do you see that column of smoke?"

"The volcano!" ejaculated Frank.

"Just so, skipper. We crossed the range just to the west of that. This river rises somewhere in those heights."

"How far distant are they?" asked Randall, with interest.

"About seventy miles," calculated Frank.

"Yes, fully one hundred," declared Wendel; "distances are greater in this sort of atmosphere."

"That is quite likely," agreed Frank, "but it looks to me as if we must have rough traveling to get there."

"Stick to the river," declared Wendel, "then there will be no trouble."

The voyagers now kept their gaze constantly upon the distant volcanic range. The blue haze which seemed to hang over their black summits was certainly fair proof that a land free from snow and ice existed beyond.

It was easy enough to understand why snow and ice did not cling to the volcanic mountains for the internal fires doubtless banished it. But what was beyond would have been a matter of conjecture but for Wendel's story.

The gleam which hung over the Antarctic country had begun to increase largely, until it became certain that the Polar night was at hand.

The sun had not been seen above the horizon since entering the fiord, and there were times when it became almost necessary to use the search-light.

But they had soon covered most of the distance to the volcanic hills. As they drew nearer, they were compelled to leave the river, as the ice melted and huge stretches of open water appeared.

But fortunately the surface of the ground was such that they had little trouble in making their way along, until finally long, level tracts of green slope lay between them and the volcano.

An eruption was soon in progress, and the spectacle was a grand one.

The ground trembled even where they were, and great fiery streams of lava were seen coursing down the crater's side.

Immense shafts of fire, smoke and ashes shot up from the crater to an enormous height.

While the eruption was in progress it was not deemed best to approach nearer. It lasted fully two hours.

When it ceased Frank sent the Scorchers ahead. Between the volcano and an adjoining mountain he saw a deep pass, and into this the machine plunged.

It was as dark as Erebus, but the search-light made the way clearer. Great walls of basalt rose upon either side.

Wendel, however, assured Frank that this pass was the true entrance to the warm valleys beyond. So the young inventor did not hesitate.

The snow shoes had been removed from the wheels, for they now left the snow and ice region behind.

The air had rapidly grown milder, and it became necessary to remove all heavy clothing. Indeed the air which now rushed through the gorge was like a hot blast.

In a short while, however, as Wendel had predicted the walls of the gorge began to widen, and now for the first time our voyagers beheld the land of promise, the new continent.

There it lay before them, green and fertile and beautiful as far as the eye could reach.

From their exalted position they could see a great panorama, smooth green plains, clumps of trees, winding streams and beautiful lakes. They gazed upon it spellbound.

For months they had beheld nothing but stormy waters, cold icebergs and inhospitable rocks.

It was a relief to the senses and to the soul to now gaze upon this wonderful revelation of Divine Nature.

Wendel and Barney and Pomp raised their caps and cheered.

"Be me sowl, it looks foine down there!" cried the Celt; "shure I'd loike a dip in that clear cool wather!"

Everybody laughed at this.

"What, so soon after leaving a region of ice, Barney?" cried Randall. "Really, I should not think your blood would heat so quickly as that."

But Barney hung to his hobby and announced his intention of taking the swim whenever the Scorchers should have reached the right locality. Pomp did the same.

The intense gloom which prevailed over the ice region for some strange reason did not seem to exist here. A peculiar bright light

which seemed like a reflection from the zenith made the Polar Continent quite light.

For a time our adventurers regarded the panorama below them. Then Frank started the Scorcher down the mountain slopes to a series of plateaus just below.

Wendel was right in his element.

He recalled many scenes and incidents upon all sides and never tired of telling of them.

Frank inquired:

"But the cities and towns, and the Polar people. We have seen nothing of them yet!"

"Well, it is high time!" replied Wendel. "I think we will see them from lower ground."

So all looked forward eagerly to this possibility. The Scorcher with brakes on slowly made its way down the mountain side.

Soon, after a descent of a few thousand feet, not unattended with risk the machine slid out upon a plateau. Here the surface was comparatively smooth and free from obstructions.

The Scorcher rolled forward to the verge of the plateau.

Then glasses were brought out, and all looked for the habitations described by Wendel, but the old sailor was given a great surprise.

They were nowhere visible.

Words can hardly depict his supreme amazement. The eyes of all were fixed upon him.

"Well, I'm blowed," exclaimed the old sailor. "I can say that there were cities and towns and people here, when I was here before! I don't see how they could take wings and fly away!"

"That is very curious, Jack," said Randall. "Are you sure this is the locality visited by you?"

"Sartin it is, mate!"

Presently Frank and Randall descended from the deck of the Scorcher, and strolled along the verge of the plateau.

"In every other respect," said Randall, "the old fellow's story has proven correct."

"That is true," replied Frank, "and yet it seems hardly possible that he could be mistaken in regard to seeing the people and their towns."

"Exactly! How then do you explain the discrepancy?"

"There is one way."

"What is it?"

"Perhaps they have departed for some other parts of this region."

"Abandoned the country?"

"Just so!"

"But—what would be their reason?"

"That can hardly be explained without further investigation. Perhaps an enemy descended upon them and swept them out of existence. Perhaps a pestilence or a flood."

"There must have been some reason for it."

"Just so!"

"Well, what shall we do?"

"I propose that we push our way down into this abandoned country. We will doubtless find some trace of the Polar people, perhaps the ruins of their towns."

"I agree with you and I am eager to go on. Let us lose no time."

"One moment please!"

Frank placed his glass to his eyes and studied some objects in the valley below for a few moments.

Then he exclaimed:

"Have you a glass, Randall?"

"Yes."

"Take a look to the east of that little clump of trees down there. Do you see anything?"

Randall complied with this request. His face changed.

"It looks a building of stone."

"Exactly."

"If there are others, or if it is one of a town, they are hidden behind the trees."

"So I believe. Wendel has told us truly. Let us go down there at once. How far is it?"

"Ten miles."

"Yes, all of that."

Hastily the two explorers made their way back to the Scorcher. It needed but a glance for the others to see at once that something was up.

"Wha' am de word, Marse Frank?" asked Pomp eagerly.

"Move!" replied Frank. "We shall go ahead, and I believe important discoveries are near at hand."

CHAPTER V.

THE RUINED CITY.

ALL received this word with a cry of joy.

In a few moments the Scorcher was descending to the next plateau. Here a revelation was accorded the adventurers, as Frank had promised.

For there, just beyond the fringe of trees, there was indeed visible quite plainly the white ruins of a town.

It was surrounded by a demolished wall of stone, resembling marble. All about this were trees of a pomegranate and mulberry type or species. It was plain that great gardens had once surrounded the town.

The buildings were all shattered and riven, as if by the force of an

earthquake or a bombardment. It was evident that the city was destroyed by some force as yet unknown.

And the inhabitants—were they destroyed also?

With great interest and powerful curiosity the voyagers watched the ruined city as they drew nearer to it.

A long level prairie now alone intervened. To cross this did not require a great space of time.

But the Scorcher now struck into what looked like a sort of road leading down to the town gates. Part of the way it was fringed with a hedge of firs.

And at intervals the ruins of strange looking houses were seen upon either hand. The adventurers regarded them wonderingly.

On ran the Scorcher at a fair rate of speed.

And it followed that very soon the machine crossed a causeway of white stone and rolled between two high pillars into the main street of the town.

It was noted then how curiously the place was laid out.

The entire town described a circle, all the streets beginning at the gate and extending in circles about a hollow or amphitheater in the center.

It was a strong reminder of a coliseum, the houses occupying the position of the seats. In the center of the public square or circle rather, there had stood a tall shaft of stone fully one hundred feet high.

Doubtless this was a monument commemorating some heroic deed or mighty occasion. In this sentiment at least the Polar people resembled their civilized neighbors beyond the ice belt.

"By Jove," exclaimed Randall, "these people were the equal of the ancient Aztecs. Their architecture shows that."

"They may be our equals," said Frank. "We have as yet no means of proving the contrary."

"That is very true."

There were some obstructions in the street of the Polar city, but the Scorcher managed to pick its way along without great difficulty.

Not until the central part of the city was reached did the machine stop. Then Frank stepped out on deck, and cried:

"Well, friends, here we are. We have accomplished the great feat of crossing the Antarctic barrier and invading the Polar continent. We have discovered a ruined town, and evidence that this was once an inhabited region though now abandoned. Let us therefore set foot on Polar soil and devote some time to exploration."

Cheers followed this declaration, and all leaped over the rail.

There was little need of guarding the Scorcher, for no living foe was in the vicinity. Barney and Pomp began a frolic on the green turf, while Frank, with Randall and the sailor, began the exploration.

They scrambled over the ruins of the building, and were impressed with the fact that their architecture had been of a tasty kind.

"These people were not savages," declared Frank. "They understood the arts. Look!"

He picked up an object which all saw at once was a helmet or head-dress. It was bascinet shaped, and of a strange kind of bronze-like metal.

"What is the metal?" asked Randall, as he examined it. Then he gave a sharp cry.

"What is the matter?" asked Frank.

"Do you know what kind of metal this is?" asked Randall.

"No!"

Frank knew that the other was an expert metallurgist. So he awaited the announcement with interest.

"Well," said Randall, slowly, "its chief component part is gold!"

"Gold!"

"Yes, also in the alloy is silver and iron. That proves that these people knew the use metals. It proves more!"

"Well?"

"That gold is one of the common ores of this region."

Frank and Wendel gave a start. Their eyes shone.

How easy it is to arouse the gold fever in the human composition. It is as natural as breathing.

But Frank regained himself.

"That adds to the value of our discovery!" he cried. "At no distant day doubtless gold seekers will forsake Australia and Africa for the Polar mines."

"Exactly! I have no doubt that rich deposits exist here!"

"Well," said Frank, "they are of little use to us just now. Ha! What have we here?"

As he spoke the young inventor had taken a step forward.

At his feet yawned a deep pit. There were stone stairs descending into it.

What seemed like a crypt, or underground chambers, were doubtless below. This reflection was enough.

Exploration was the order; so Frank hesitated no longer, but prepared to descend into the place.

Randall waited curiously for Frank to descend. Then he followed.

They stood in a little square chamber, apparently cut out of solid rock. Beyond was a narrow passage, but as black as Erebus.

"What is it?" asked Randall. "It looks like a tomb."

"And so it may be," agreed Frank, "or perhaps a treasure vault. At any rate, we will explore it."

He stepped into the dark passage; but before he had proceeded ten feet he abruptly halted.

In the darkness ahead there blazed two fearful balls of fire. Instinctively Frank shivered.

He knew that some fierce animal—a panther or wolf—had made this hole their den.

He was face to face with the creature and it was by no means a despicable foe or an enviable situation. In this dark place it would not be easy to defend one's self.

A deep hoarse growl came from the depths. Then Frank gasped: "A bear!"

He retreated backward precipitately hoping to reach the outer chamber, but the glaring eyeballs were close upon him.

Frank had for weapons only a revolver and a knife.

He drew the revolver and fired point blank at the eyes. Before he could fire again it was struck from his grasp by a huge paw and he had to fall back on his knife.

Another blow of the paw brought him to his knees and he was obliged to clinch with his foe.

Meanwhile Randall and Wendel had grasped the situation.

The former tried to drag Frank from the dark passage and in the struggle both man and bear emerged. This was a better chance for Frank.

The bear was of a monster black species. Frank was driving the knife into its carcass, but it seemed to have no effect.

It was Wendel who saved the day.

He luckily had his rifle with him. Rushing forward he placed it at the bear's head and fired point blank.

The ball crashed through bruin's brain and ended the struggle. Frank detached himself from the brute's embrace.

By a miracle he was comparatively unharmed, having only a few hard scratches to show for his struggle.

But it was a close call.

"By Jupiter," gasped Randall. "I thought you were done for that time, Frank."

"I owe my life to you," said Frank, gripping Wendel's hand.

"I am glad of that, mate," replied the sailor, heartily.

"Do you think there are any more bears in there?" asked Randall.

"No!" replied Frank, "but it is well to use precaution. Let us proceed with care."

Once more they crept into the passage. In a few moments they stood in a gloom-filled chamber.

At one end of this was another pit and stairs. They evidently led down to deeper regions.

It was too dark to proceed further at haphazard. So Frank turned about, and said:

"If one of us can go back to the Scorchers and get an electric lantern I think we can go further."

"I'll do that!" agreed Wendel, and away he went.

It was not long before he returned with the lantern. This had a powerful burner and lit up the subterranean chambers fully.

Down the second flight of steps the explorers now proceeded. A remarkable discovery was in store for them.

Down and down a winding way they went.

Soon it was seen that the walls of the passage were of natural conformation, and that they were really in a cavern.

It trended downward for what seemed an interminable distance. Then suddenly a startling surprise was accorded all.

For they had emerged into a mighty, high-domed cavern chamber. Its limits could not be seen.

But it was nearly occupied with a mighty subterranean lake. The water flashed in the lantern's glare.

"An underground sea!" cried Randall. "What a wonder!"

"And access to it by the Polar people," mused Frank. "What was their purpose?"

"Perhaps to get water or to fish," suggested Wendel. "Eh? what kind of a craft is this?"

As he spoke he bent down over a sort of coracle which lay in the sands. Paddles were against the thwarts just as it had been left by its former owners.

The little craft was examined and found to be quite staunch.

But just at that moment Randall gripped Frank's arm.

"Look!" he whispered.

He pointed across the domed lake. There was a strange leaping, fantastic glare of light. It appeared at intervals and was intensely weird and fanciful in its shapes.

CHAPTER VI.

ACROSS THE LAKE.

OF course the cupidity and curiosity of the explorers was aroused. Not one but had a keen desire to know what the meaning of the light was. So after a few moments Randall said:

"That beats me! What is it?"

"Give it up!" said Wendel.

"We ought to investigate it. Eh, Frank?"

"That's what we're here for," replied the young inventor.

He stepped into the coracle. It would hold three easily.

A moment later they were boldly sallying forth upon the waters of the underground lake. Frank, however, was very careful to keep his bearings, leaving the lantern to mark the spot they had just left.

Wendel and Randall used the paddles, while Frank steered. Thus they made their way over the underground waters.

They were placid, even dead, for there was no breeze to ripple their surface.

But there was another power, and it was felt before the voyagers were half across.

Suddenly the coracle began to wobble and turn. Randall and the sailors pulled harder at the paddles.

But it did no good. The little craft began to rock most violently.

"What in the deuce is the matter?" asked Randall, excitedly.

"What ails the boat?"

"I think the waves are rising in the lake," said Wendel. "Yes, there is really some commotion under us, mates."

"Right!" cried Frank, as he balanced the coracle. "Keep steady, or we'll be over."

It seemed as if the lake had become a boiling caldron.

The water foamed and surged and pitched until the three voyagers were certain that they would go to the bottom.

But they did not.

A distant sullen, booming sound was heard, like rumbling thunder. Then there was a muffled explosion, a hissing cloud of steam surged across the lake, and then all became quiet again.

The coracle rested safely once more upon the placid waters.

Then the voyagers collected their wits. Light from the electric lantern yet shone obliquely across the little craft, and in the water Frank saw some small objects floating.

He put his hand over the thwarts and picked up one.

It was cold and slimy and slid out of his hand into the bottom of the boat.

"What's that?" cried Randall.

"A fish!" ejaculated Frank; "the water is alive with them. Something has killed them."

This was true.

The surface of the lake was covered with the dead fish. Surely some internal convulsion had taken place.

The red fire at the other end of the lake could now be seen plainer than ever.

It was like looking into a veritable Hades, or through the yawning jaws of a red hot furnace. The voyagers gazed wonder-struck at it.

Then they paddled on slowly.

"Shall we go ahead, mates?" asked Wendel.

"Why not?" ejaculated Randall.

"Nothing, only if another whirl of the waters took place again like that we might have to swim."

"I am willing to risk it," said Randall, looking at Frank.

"It will probably not occur again," declared the young inventor.

"Then we will go ahead?"

"Yes."

Randall and the sailor gave way at the paddles. The coracle sped on and every moment drew nearer the fiery furnace.

Then it was seen that the cavern here enlarged into a mighty yawning pit, which was filled with smoke and flames, and from which arose fearful fumes.

A gallery ran from the lake shore to this pit and divided the two by about fifty feet of solid rock. The heat of the furnace was intense.

But the voyagers did not hesitate to draw the coracle up on the shore and walk over to the fiery pit.

It covered fully an acre. High above it was a funnel-like shaft.

Up this the flames and smoke and the deadly heat seemed to shoot. All in that instant Frank guessed the truth.

"By jove," he exclaimed, "I know where we are!"

"Eh?" exclaimed Randall.

"We are in the volcano!"

"The volcano?"

"Yes."

"Impossible!"

"Not so! If you remember we have traveled a good ways underground, and it has carried us without a doubt under the plateaus and straight into the heart of the mountain. Probably this is only one of half a hundred or more internal craters."

The logic of this assumption was at once obvious.

Certainly in no other way could this crater of fire be explained. For a time the three men were silent.

They studied the strange scene awhile, then Randall said:

"Well, Frank, what shall we do about it?"

"Follow me," said the young inventor.

Frank led the way around the gallery. It trended upward, and soon shot off at right angles into a serpentine course beyond the wall of the pit of fire.

It was as if this corkscrew-like passage had been bored for just such a purpose as it was now used. Frank led the way.

It was like ascending a winding stair in a tower. But before they had gone far Randall asked:

"Where are we going, Frank?"

"To follow this passage to its end," was the reply.

"Where do you think it will end?"

"I don't know. It may come out on top of the volcano."

"But—is there no danger of losing our way?"

"I think not."

"And if we come out on top of the mountain, shall we return this way?"

"We shall see."

As they advanced now, the situation became one filled with terrors.

It was as if they were in a literal pandemonium. All sorts of strange sounds were about them.

There was the rumble of thunder, the gurgle of molten liquid and the hiss of steam. Then terrific explosions came with fearful echoes through the cavernous depths.

It was sufficient to strike fear into a strong man's bosom. For a time even Frank Reade, Jr., himself was a trifle daunted.

"Is it quite safe, Frank?" asked Randall, with some apprehension. "Suppose a stream of lava should come tearing down this passage?" "It would cook us," said Frank, imperturbably, "but we won't anticipate that!"

"Ugh!" exclaimed Wendel, "I think we'd better get out of here as soon as possible!"

"And so we will," declared Frank, "but this is a water course. I don't believe we need fear lava; we ought to be near the summit."

But they toiled on for another hour. Then, however, they emerged into the open air.

The transition was for a moment surprising. Even the semi-gloom of the Antarctic night was dazzling.

But they were high in air, and a mighty panorama of country lay before their gaze.

To the northward, shrouded in dull gloom, was the barrier of ice snow; to the south, the Polar Continent in its green hue.

To the east, the great pass, and west, the line of mighty craters, which belched at intervals the fiery contents a thousand feet into the air.

It was a spectacle which literally appalled the adventurers. They were truly on a new continent in an unexplored world.

Then Randall exclaimed:

"How is it, Frank? Shall we stay here long?"

"No," replied Frank. "I have accomplished my object; let us now return to the Scorchers."

Randall was about to reenter the downward passage, but Frank cried:

"Not that way!"

"What?"

"We will not return that way."

"Why not?"

"It is too far and too perilous. We can just slide down the mountain side here easier."

"But we left the electric lantern on the shore of that lake——"

"Hang the lantern," cried Frank; "we'll let it stay there. We'll not go back for it now at least."

"All right," cried Randall, "I'm more than agreeable. Let's slide on down."

And down the crater side they proceeded to travel. Leaping from rock to rock they went rapidly down.

Soon the plateau below was reached. Then they saw the Scorchers dimly in the distance down the valley.

It was quite a long tramp down over the steep slopes to where the machine was. Barney and Pomp were not in sight.

When the three explorers reached the Scorchers after threading their way among the ruins, they were surprised to find the two jokers missing.

The truth was, they had gone upon a little exploring expedition of their own.

When Frank and his companions disappeared in the old rim, the Celt turned a handspring on the pavement, and cried:

"Be me sowl naygur, phwat do yez say av we have a little exploration av our own?"

"Pse wif yo', I'ish. Wha' am we gwine fo' to explore?"

"The whole town, yez ignoramus! Shure, it's loikely we may find some valuable relics ourselves. Thin Mither Frank will be afther thankin' us fer them!"

Pomp hesitated.

"Wha' do yo' fink ob leavin' de Scorchers?" he asked.

"Shure, that will be all roight. Don't yez have no fears about that at all, at all!"

"A'right? I go yo', I'ish. Jes' yo' lead de way an' I follers on!"

"Which it's proper yez should, considerin' me superior advantages," declared Barney, in his puffiest way; "do yez see that big heap av sthones down yender?"

"Yas!"

"Well, I belave that's some koind av a ruined temple or the loikes, an' we'll thry that first off!"

"A'right, I'ish. Yo' go ahead."

In a few moments they were among the ruins of a huge building, which as Barney said might have been a temple.

They passed among a heap of fallen pillars, and just as the others had done found a descending stairway.

CHAPTER VII.

BARNEY'S AND POMP'S ADVENTURES.

"PHWERE the divil do yez suppose that goes to?" cried Barney, glancing somewhat timorously down into the place.

"Golly! I cudn't guess so hard a one as dat, I'ish!"

"Be me sowl, I belave there's a big treasure hid away down therel Who knows but that murtherin' ould sculpin', Captain Kidd, left his gould in this spot?"

Pomp's eyes glistened.

"We ain' gwine to find out unless we tries it," he said.

"Yez are roight, naygur. Jist climb down there an' take a look about whoile I load up me pistol."

"Yo' go yo'self!" sniffed the dorky. "Yo' am de leadah. Kain't play no tricks on dis chile!"

"Begorra, I'm not afther thryin' to do that!" cried Barney, indignantly. "Go an wid yez fer a big coward. Shure, it's afraid yez are!"

"I ain' afraid!"

"Yez are?"

"Youse 'fraid yo'self!"

This was enough for Barney. He gave the dorky a look of withering contempt and then ventured down into the place.

Down the steps he blundered and soon found himself at the bottom of them. A dim light showed him the way through a long corridor.

This was paved and extended far beyond the range of his vision. The Celt hesitated a moment.

"Be me sowl, we kin do moighty little widout a lantern, naygur. Wud yez go back and get one?"

"A'right!" agreed the dorky.

So back to the Scorchers went Pomp. He soon returned with a lantern.

This aided the two explorers very materially. They were able to easily see their way now.

Along the passage they proceeded and came to another flight of steps. As they descended these, Barney remarked:

"Shure they seem to be a bit shaky, naygur. Luk out fer thet lower one."

"A'right, I'ish!"

In fact it did not look to be a difficult thing to tumble the whole pile of masonry down. However, the two explorers now entered another passage.

Suddenly they came to a curious niche in the wall of stone. Barney scanned it a moment carefully in the light of the lantern.

Then he said:

"On me honor, naygur, this is a big dure in the wall."

"A door, yo' say?" asked the dorky.

"Yis."

"A stone door? I don't see it."

"Begorra, yez will!"

Barney put his hand in the niche and began to pull upon a metal bar which he saw there. It was consumed with rust, and crumbled in his grasp.

But the pressure was sufficient to cause a huge slab of stone several feet square to move out of place, leaving an aperture.

This was large enough to admit the body of a man. Barney flashed his lantern's rays into it.

The sight which he beheld gave him a chill.

A small apartment hewed out of the solid rock was seen. Its walls were damp and moldy, but what transfixed the two explorers with horror was the fact that the place was a literal charnel house.

There, exposed to their view, were four human skeletons. They were in various positions against the crumbling wall.

For an instant Barney thought that the apartment might be a tomb.

But second thought told him better than this. The position of the skeletons disproved the theory.

"Mither presave us!" gasped the Celt in horror. "Phwat do yez say to that?"

"Golly fo' glory!" echoed Pomp, "dey shut dem po' chaps in dar to die!"

"Be me sowl, that was a hard fate fer them!" cried Barney. "An' Hiven rist their sows! Shure, whoiver do yez suppose they cud av been?"

"Huh! I done fink dat dis was a big prison, I'ish, an' dat dese were some ob de prisoners."

"Av coorse, yez blockhead! But who may the poor divils be? Howld the lantern, an' I'll be afther takin' a bit av a luk at them."

With which Barney crawled into the place.

All raiment which the dead men might have worn had fallen to decay. There seemed nothing left but the bones.

But of a sudden Barney's keen eye caught some lines in the black surface of the stone wall. They were scratched quite deep with some sharp instrument.

To the Celt's surprise they were in legible English, and thus he read them:

"JULY, 10th, 18—

"Heaven have mercy upon our souls, and should this ever meet the gaze of civilized beings, pity us.

"We sailed from Montevideo in January after Southern seals. Nipped in an ice patch, our good ship, the Hesper, went to the bottom. For months we wandered about the accursed ice country, until finally we discovered this Polar land, free from ice and snow. But we were surrounded by the Polar people, whose traditions forbade the coming among them of any being beyond the ice belt.

"So we were condemned to imprisonment and death by starvation. We are confined in this awful hole to die. There is no hope of rescue, no chance for life. We must die. Already the awful shadow of the eternal is descending upon us. Our names are:

"John Fenton, Shipmaster.

"Alec Smythe, Mate.

"Jed Manson, Seaman.

"Pierre Martin, Seaman apprentice.

"I, John Fenton, scrawl these lines. This is all we can leave behind us. Heaven rest our souls, for we are buried alive; lost forever! Farewell to earth and friends. Requiescat in Pace.

"JOHN FENTON, Salem, Mass."

Barney read all this aloud and then he and Pomp shivered as they regarded the skeletons.

"Golly!" gasped the coon; "dat am de mos' orful fink I eber heern tell ob! Come out ob dar, I'ish! Le's get out ob dis place!"

"Devil a bit until I've found out if there are any more av the same kind here," declared the Celt.

And he went on down the passage. His quest was not unrewarded. There were other cells and in some of them were skeletons.

But in no other place did he find a record. Also the conformation of the skulls satisfied him that these victims were doubtless criminals of the Polar nation and not civilized men.

These vaults were doubtless part of a great prison. They extended a long distance underground.

But the two explorers soon tired of the quest, and decided to get out of the grewsome place as quickly as possible.

"Golly, I've seen nuff ob dis place," declared Pomp. "I've ready fo' to get a brea' ob fresh air."

"Cum on then," said Barney, "shure, we'll have something to tell Mither Frank, anyway!"

"Dat am a'right."

So they set out along the corridor. But when they reached the foot of the shaky, stone staircase, they were confronted with a horrible discovery.

It had caved in, and a section of the wall also yielding, the entire passage was closed.

They were shut off from the outside world by a depth of earth and rocks which they could not easily calculate. It was a stunning reflection.

For a moment neither could speak.

"Gor' a'mighty," finally ejaculated Pomp, "we'se in fo' it now!"

"Be me sow! it looks loike it!"

"Shuah's youse bo'n we'se buried alibe 'long wif de res' ob dese people!"

Barney had turned a grayish pallor.

"Bejabers, Mither Frank will be afther gettin' us out," he declared.

"Marse Frank neber fin' out whar we gwine ter; we's in de soup, yo' kin bet!"

Trembling and faint, the two jokers sank down onto the damp pavement. Both were plucky, keen-witted fellows, and they tried to think. Finally Barney rose.

"Wha' am yo' gwine to do, I'ish?"

"Begorra, I'm goin' ter thry an' dig me way out av this," declared the Celt.

"Dig?"

"Yis!"

"A'right; I'se wif yo'!"

They had no spade or pick, but they had strong hands, and soon got to work. Their efforts were not without avail.

The earth was coarse and gravelly, and much easier displaced than as if it had been solid dirt.

In a very short time they had cleared quite a space in the heap of debris. Then they came upon two huge slabs of rock, a part of the stone staircase.

However, beneath their most intense exertions these rocks were moved aside and they fell to digging again.

It seemed as if they had been in the place for an eternity, and they were getting exhausted without seeming to be any nearer the outer passage than ever, when Barney suddenly stopped work and began to listen.

Pomp looked up in surprise.

"Wha' am de mattah, I'ish?" he asked.

"Bejabers I belave there's somewan digging beyant us," he declared.

"Yo' does?"

"Yes, I do!"

Then they fell to listening.

When Frank with Randall and the sailor reached the Scorchers they were unable to find any trace of Barney and Pomp, they were not a little alarmed.

They shouted and fired their pistols; but no answer came.

"That is very odd!" exclaimed Frank. "Where the deuce can they be?"

"Can anything have befallen them?" asked Randall.

"That I am unable to answer. I certainly hope not."

"With due respect, sir," said Wendel, "perhaps they have gone off on a little cruise of their own and mislaid the course."

"I believe you have the right of it," agreed Frank. "We must look them up or track them if we can!"

"Could we follow their trail in this hard soil?" asked Randall.

"We will try."

With this the quest began. As good fortune had it Randall found his way quite accurately to the staircase in the demolished prison.

In the dust on the steps were the marks of footprints.

"We have found them, Frank!" he cried. "Here are the footprints!"

In a moment the young inventor was on the spot and closely examining the marks. He was at once satisfied that the trail was found.

CHAPTER VIII.

A GEOLOGICAL PHENOMENON.

THERE were the footprints of two men just as they descended the stairs. But there were no return marks.

"They are yet down there," declared Frank positively.

Randall looked at him keenly.

"Is this another entrance to the volcano?" he asked.

The young inventor shook his head.

"I think not," he said; "though what should detain them down there I do not understand."

"Well, suppose we go down?"

"Certainly."

The three men went quickly down the stair-case. They were soon in the passage which had been followed by Barney and Pomp.

But they did not follow it far. Their progress was checked. A great wall of earth and stone confronted them.

At once the truth flashed upon Frank.

"A cave-in!" he declared. "They are imprisoned!"

Randall was deadly pale as he turned to Frank.

"My soul! You don't think they are under that debris?"

"Let us pray not!"

"What shall we do?"

"There is but one thing!"

Frank threw off his coat. Then he turned to the stairs.

"Where are you going?" asked Randall.

"After shovels and picks. We must do some hard digging. I shall not leave here until I have brought them out dead or alive!"

"Amen!" cried Randall. "I am with you, Frank!"

In less time than it takes to tell it the tools were brought and work begun. And it was at this juncture that Barney and Pomp heard their deliverers.

At once they guessed the truth and Barney joyously cried:

"Whurroo! we're goin' to git out of here, naygur, shure. It's Mither Frank afther us!"

Then the two imprisoned fellows went to work like beavers. In a short while they were able to shout and be heard on the other side.

The rest was easy.

Before long they crawled out of their captivity, and none too soon either, for the air was getting extremely foul and dangerous.

But soon they were above ground and safe. It was a joyful moment for all.

Further exploration of the ruined town was made, but nothing of great interest was discovered, and finally Frank concluded to go on. So all went on board the Scorchers, and it rolled away across the Polar country.

Everywhere was that same desolate, abandoned appearance. What had become of the Polar people, it was not easy to guess.

Cities and towns to the number of a dozen were encountered in the next week. Then the explorers came to a high mountain range, which Frank declared marked exactly the locality of the South Pole.

It must have been ten or twelve thousand feet in height, and was all of solid granite.

Sheer from the green plains the mountain walls rose to a dizzy height. It was a stupendous sight.

Nowhere did they seem possible of ascent. But as he studied them an idea occurred to Frank.

What was on the other side of them?

Was there a fertile region like this, or was it a desert waste? Who could say but that the mysterious disappearance of the Polar people was here capable of explanation?

Perhaps they had abandoned the region this side of the range for a land of milk and honey on the other. Frank had a powerful desire to see what was on the other side of that impenetrable and insurmountable wall.

But he saw no easy way of scaling it. It was shut in on both sides by an equal wall, extending for over a hundred miles in both directions.

Mystery—mystery! This was in the very air of the abandoned country. He was unable to solve it.

The Scorchers traveled along the wall for several days. But there was no break which would allow the machine to cross it.

"Well I'm beat!" muttered the young inventor at last; "this beats all the puzzles I ever attempted."

"It's a mighty curious part of the world, mates!" declared Wendel. "I agree with you!" said Frank, "but there must be some explanation of the mystery."

And he continued to grope for it. But the days passed and he was no nearer success than ever.

Meanwhile the Antarctic night was wearing on.

While the sky remained clear of clouds, the semi-gloom of the landscape was not bad. But when clouds obscured the heavens, then at times the darkness was most intense.

At such times it was often necessary to abandon the quest and wait for the darkness to pass.

The search-light of course would dispel the gloom, but as it would be slow work pursuing research at such a time, Frank suspended all operations.

And thus time wore on.

But thrilling events were in store.

One day the Scorchers rested at the base of the high mountain wall. Frank and Randall had left her for a walk over the green turf.

Randall was an expert geologist, and had spent much time in examining the strata of the region.

Now, as they strolled along, he cast his gaze upward critically along the great rock wall. Suddenly he came to a halt.

"Frank," he said, "I think I have hit upon a discovery!"

"Eh?" exclaimed the young inventor.

"It is true, and if my theories prove correct, it is a most important one!"

"What is it?"

Randall pointed up to several distinct lines of various heights on the mountain wall.

"Do you see those lines?"

"Yes."

"The highest one is full two hundred feet."

"That is true."

"Well, have you never seen lines like those before?"

Frank studied the face of the cliff a moment.

Then he said:

"Yes, I think I have. They look like high water marks upon cliffs at the seashore."

"Just so. Now if they are water marks it must mean that there have been times when this whole basin, this entire Polar country has been under water."

Frank was astounded.

"At the glacial epoch?" he asked.

"Glacial epoch be hanged! Within a hundred years, more or less."

The two men gazed at each other. Frank looked incredulous, but Randall was convinced.

"Mark you," resumed the geologist, "I have closely examined the drift and strata of this region. All point to this conclusion. Also that the basin has been occupied by water at different intervals. What I mean is that the presence of water has been periodical."

Frank rubbed his eye.

"In that case—"

"The place may become submerged again, and I believe that the period is not far distant. If my hypothesis is correct," continued the geologist, "we have a very logical explanation of the abandonment of this country by its inhabitants."

Frank was so overcome by the astounding force of this declaration that for a time he could not speak.

After some thought he said:

"You have certainly hit upon a logical idea, Randall. But if it is true, where does this flood come from, and how would the people know it?"

Randall pointed at the distant column of smoke rising from the volcano.

"Do you see that?" he asked, "it means that this entire region is governed by volcanic forces. Now the action of the internal forces of which we know little may be capable of bringing a vast volume of water periodically to the surface from subterranean basins. The pressure would be sufficient. Synonymous with certain actions of yonder volcano, this beautiful land of promise is flooded to the brim."

Frank gazed keenly at Randall. He had not given him credit for so much penetration.

"And that is why this country has been abandoned?"

"Just so! It is easy enough to see how the people could tell when danger threatened. The eruptions of the volcano are doubtless periodical. The Polar people knew just when to abandon this valley."

"Whew!" exclaimed Frank, "then according to that it is apt to become flooded at any time now!"

"Just so!"

"Randall, you are keen!"

"Pshaw! it only requires a little study. Do you see that little rivulet trickling out from under the mountain wall?"

"Yes!"

"Well, that was not there yesterday."

"Eh?"

"It is true!"

Even as he spoke Randall gave an exclamation. He pointed to a patch of turf near and whispered:

"Look—look! You cannot want better evidence."

Frank gazed in the direction indicated, and both beheld a most astounding thing.

The little path of turf had begun to throb and heave. Soon dew-like moisture was seen on the blades.

Then up shot a little bulb of boiling water. It momentarily grew larger.

The turf was gently thrust aside and disintegrated, while a tiny stream flowed away down the incline, making its own course and momentarily growing larger.

A spring had burst into life in that moment.

"That is only one of many," declared Randall. "You shall see."

Deep in the center of the Polar valley was a lake.

It was true that this was steadily rising above its banks. All this was *prima facie* evidence.

Astonished, Frank watched the phenomenon.

Then he turned and swept a glance up at the mountain wall.

"It seems to me that our position then is one of peril," he said.

"What is to save us if the valley fills as you aver? We would be drowned like rats in a trap."

CHAPTER IX.

ON AN ISLAND.

"You are right," agreed Randall, "and it will not do to tempt fate."

"What shall we do?"

"We must leave here."

"Where shall we go?"

"Back to the mountains. From there I believe we can watch the whole wonderful phenomenon."

"All right," agreed Frank, with alacrity; "it shall be as you say; but one thing puzzles me."

"Well?"

"What has become of the people who abandoned this doomed country?"

"It is easy enough to guess. Doubtless they have made their way to other parts of the Antarctic as yet undiscovered by any one."

"Before I leave this land of wonders I must find them," declared Frank. "I must take a look at them."

"I don't see why we cannot accomplish that," declared Randall; "then we will return to the other end of the valley, will we?"

"By all means!"

In a few moments more Frank and Randall were aboard the Scorch-er.

They said nothing to the others of the subject uppermost in their minds. But Frank started the machine at once back up the valley.

Scarcely twenty miles had been made, however, when a strange, grayish bank of clouds began to rise upward toward the zenith.

Thus far our adventurers had not experienced a storm of any violence. There had been only some slight rains.

But the moment Frank saw the strangely tinted clouds he became alarmed.

"On my word, Randall," he said, "I believe we are going to have a rough storm."

The geologist's face was grave. He studied the sky a moment. Then he swept the landscape.

"Which is the highest point of land near here?" he asked.

"I think it is yonder hill," said Frank, pointing to an elevation about five miles distant.

"How far is it over there?"

"Five miles."

"Well, I think we had better make for it. If there should come a cloud-burst, or even a heavy fall of rain, in these lowlands we might get swamped."

"I believe you are right," agreed Frank. "We will do that."

He changed the course of the Scorch-er at once. Five miles was quickly covered, and they reached the hill.

The great, angry cloud had swept up to the zenith. A blackness most intense was settling down over the landscape.

"Ugh!" exclaimed Wendel, sniffing the air, "we're going to have a bit of a blow, mates."

"Be jabbers, av that's so, I'm afther thinkin' we're on high enough land to git the whole benefit av it."

"That's true, Barney," said Frank; "but it is better than getting drowned."

"Phwat's that, sor?" asked the Celt in surprise. "Shure, there's no chance av that, is there?"

Frank saw that he had put his foot in it, to speak metaphorically, and was decided now to make a clean breast of the matter.

So he called Randall up, and said:

"I think it would be wisest to explain our situation and our fears in full to the others."

"Well," agreed Randall, "I guess you are right."

With this Frank called the others up and told them the truth. It caused them some surprise, but Wendel said:

"Well, mates, all of our family were sea-faring men, and all have found a grave in the sea but me. I don't expect to be an exception."

"Bejabbers, the naygur an' mesilf are good swimmers! Eh, naygur!"

"Yo' kin bet we is, I'ish!"

"Very good!" said Frank, with a laugh; "then we need fear nothing. Yet I believe we had better turn the machine head on to the wind and trig the wheels well."

This was done. And now all awaited with some apprehension and eagerness, the coming of the storm.

As is usual with tempests, it was not long in coming. Over the volcano it swept, bringing down into the valley a vortex of ashes and soot.

The approach of the storm was like the bellowing of a thousand wild lions. In the utter blackness its coming could only be felt, not seen.

It struck the Scorch-er with terrific force. For a few moments it seemed as if the machine was in the clutches of destroying fiends.

Then the wind passed as quickly as it came and the rain followed.

Torrents of water surged about the machine and over the deck. It seemed as if it would be engulfed.

For hours the storm raged.

Then in a lull Frank went on deck and turned on the search-light. The sight revealed was startling.

The electric light fell glaring bright upon flashing waters. All about the Scorch-er as far as the light could penetrate all was a mass of water—an inland sea.

Randall clutched his arm.

"It has come!" he said. "My hypothesis was correct!"

"Eh?" exclaimed Frank in dismay, "then we're in a fine trap."

"That is if the waters rise higher."

"Yes, or if not!"

"Why?"

"We are imprisoned on an island made by the top of this hill. The waters may not subside for a year. Nobody knows how long!"

This was the certain truth. The situation was certainly a most appalling one.

But there was one source of comfort left. The rain was beginning to subside.

In a short while the sky began to grow lighter and soon the blackness passed away. The valley became quite light.

Then the true position they were in was seen by the voyagers.

Almost the entire valley was one vast lake.

Only the higher land was exposed. In some places the water must have been of considerable depth.

One thing was certain. It was impossible for the machine to travel through it. The adventurers were anchored to the hill top isle.

What was to be done?

Frank knew well that the water was rising all the while. It was a desperate situation.

In the hold of the Scorchers there was stored a portable rubber boat. In this all could doubtless have made their way to the higher land and escaped.

But they would have been compelled to leave the Scorchers.

This would have been equivalent to signing a death warrant, and they knew it well. So Frank did not accept the chance.

He stepped down from the Scorchers deck and walked about the hill top. At one end was a clump of giant pines.

And, as his eyes fell upon these mighty trees, a sudden, swift plan suggested itself to him. He saw one forlorn chance.

But Frank Reade, Jr., was never the one to yield to despair. Scant as the chance was, he decided to adopt it.

He went hurriedly back to the Scorchers.

"Come here, all of you!" he cried. "I have hit upon a plan."

This was enough.

With alacrity all came forward. And now Frank unfolded his plan.

"Do you see those big pines?" he said. "Well, in them lies our chance. If we can hew down enough of them to make a raft to float the Scorchers, I believe there is a chance for us!"

For a moment there was silence.

Then all gave a loud cheer.

"We'll do it!" cried Randall. "Give us some axes. Come, boys! It is for our lives we are working!"

Barney and Pomp ran to get axes. Wendel and Randall and even Frank himself selected a tree.

The axes rang merrily in the soft wood and steadily all worked, each man at a tree.

In a comparatively short space of time five of the trees were down. then each set to work upon another.

But now that the trees were down the hardest part of the work began. This was to trim the huge logs and bind them together for a raft.

But this was finally accomplished. The logs were firmly bound, two tiers deep. This was reckoned as sufficient to float the machine.

Then the Scorchers was run upon it. There was little time to spare.

For the rise of the inland sea was so fast that already the water was up to their knees as they worked. The Scorchers was secured to the raft.

Then all waited for the water to cover the top of the hill and float the raft.

They had not long to wait.

It was already skimming over the highest point. The raft began to rise.

The voyagers had provided themselves with long poles to push the raft off and propel it with. Soon it was afloat.

It required several hours of hard work to propel it to the upper end of the lake or the slope of the volcano.

Here, however, a landing place was found, and the Scorchers was run off the raft upon terra firma.

A position was selected above the high water mark on the slope of the volcano. The eruption somewhat singularly had ceased altogether.

The reason for this was not apparent, but it was possible that the rising of the waters had extinguished the internal fires.

The voyagers were engaged in watching the slow rising of the inland sea, when suddenly a great cry came from Barney.

"Be me sowl, there's a lot at the spalpeens up there among the rocks," he cried. "Shure, have an eye out fer thim, or they'll be after comin' down onto us!"

"Where are they?" cried Frank, springing to Barney's side.

"Up there, sor!"

Frank was just in time to see that the Celt was right. A number of forms were scrambling over a heap of bowlders far up on the crater's side.

This was the first sign of human beings, other than themselves, in the abandoned country. It is needless to say that all were excited.

CHAPTER X.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

No one doubted for a moment that the forms scrambling over the crater's side were really the Polar natives.

Frank picked up his rifle, and cried:

"Come on, boys! Let's have a look at those chaps."

"Shall we go armed?" asked Randall.

"Of course. Men who have the nerve to confine white visitors in underground vaults to die of starvation are certainly men to be strongly dealt with."

So Randall and Barney followed Frank up the mountain.

Pomp and the sailor remained to guard the Scorchers.

Up the crater ran the pursuers.

Yet they advanced cautiously for they had no means of knowing what manner of weapons the fugitives had.

But before the summit was reached, Frank received a surprise. He saw four men huddled behind a bowlder.

And a voice in unmistakable English, cried:

"For Heaven's sake, mates, don't blame us—we're under orders!"

"Jack Mains, mate of the Pearl!" gasped Frank. "What on earth are you doing here?"

"I swear, sir, it is not our fault. Captain's orders!" declared the Pearl's mate as he and his companions came forth.

"Your captain's orders!" exclaimed Frank. "Where is he?"

"I—can't say, sir. He went down into that valley. Maybe the water—you can guess."

The astonishment of all was great.

"And do you mean to tell me," exclaimed Frank, "that your captain—that Isaac Ward actually followed us hither?"

"I do, sir," replied Mains tremblingly.

"Where is his ship?"

"Deserted, sir. For all I know, back in the ice pack and not a soul on board."

"But—" exclaimed Frank in sheer amazement, "what on earth impelled you all to leave the ship?"

"Gold, sir."

"Gold?"

"Yes, sir. Captain Ward thought you were down here after a great treasure, sir, and wanted to claim a share."

This was a revelation to Frank, and the others, too.

For a moment he was speechless.

"Well," he said, finally, "that is the worst fool's trick I ever heard of! You say he left the ship to the mercy of the ice?"

"Yes, sir!"

"And he went down into the valley?"

"Yes, sir! All went down there except me and my three friends here; we stayed back."

"My soul!" exclaimed Frank; "they have not returned! Then the flood overtook them. This is the plain result of avarice!"

For a time all were silent. The four sailors looked wretched enough.

"We are nigh dead from starvation," Mains said finally.

"Then come with me," said Frank, moving down the mountain side; "this is a terrible affair!"

"God bless you, sir!" said one of the sailors. "We will die for you—only take us back to America!"

"Humph!" exclaimed Frank, "it looks mighty doubtful now whether any of us get back or not."

Back to the Scorchers they went, and Pomp gave the surviving sailors food and drink.

Then the folly of Captain Ward's move was dilated upon. The result was a disappointment to Frank.

"I had intended remaining here for the waters to fall," he said, "but now all depends upon our reaching the Pearl before the ice pack breaks up. If we do not reach the ship in that time we may give ourselves up for lost."

"And go to swell the number of explorers who have invaded this accursed land never to return!" declared Randall.

There was certainly need of dispatch if the party were to reach the ship before the pack should break.

It was a long, arduous trip back through the fiord. It would require much time to make the trip.

Frank would have started at once but he felt in duty bound to first learn the fate of the captain and his men for a certainty. There was a faint possibility, of course, that they had made their escape.

So a party was made up and sent along the mountain side. Frank and Barney and Randall were the members of the party.

Before he returned Frank was determined to accomplish one thing and this was to gain the summit of the southern mountain wall and take a look at the country beyond.

They were well armed for there was no telling what perils they might encounter on the way. They struck out along the southern verge of the crater.

Soon they were out of sight of the Scorchers among the huge bowlders. Frank led the way.

But they had little idea of the character of the region through which they were now compelled to travel.

It was fearfully rough and in places almost inaccessible.

They climbed along the mountain wall for hours and yet the southern end of the valley looked an interminable distance away. Finally they sank down from sheer exhaustion.

There was nothing for it but to camp on the spot and this was done. In a little pocket among the crags a sheltered spot was found.

They had brought some provisions with them and were enabled to make a good meal. Then they stretched themselves out upon the ground and slept.

How long they slept they knew not, but when they awoke it was to find a peculiar state of affairs. A heavy mist hung over the mountains and rain was falling slowly.

It was evident that a storm was at hand and for a moment Frank was nonplused. He knew the peril of their situation at once.

The difficulty was to proceed on their journey in the dense fog.

It would be almost impossible to tell where they were going. It was impossible to get accurate bearings.

It would be just as difficult to find their way back to the Scorchers. Here was a predicament.

What was to be done?

There seemed no other way than to remain where they were until after the storm should pass. How long this would be it was impossible to guess.

Now to Frank this was especially irritating, for he knew that time was valuable. He was exceedingly impatient.

And yet he was at a loss to know how to remedy the difficulty. There seemed no way but to wait until the storm had passed.

It shut down now blacker than ever. Soon the mist lifted a trifle and the rain fell harder.

Hours passed and they seemed like months. At length Frank could stand it no longer.

"That settles it," he cried. "We cannot do worse than stay here. Let us make an effort to return."

"And give up the expedition?" asked Randall.

"Yes; we are obliged to do that. If we can return in safety to the Scorchers that will be all I will ask!"

"I'm with you, Frank!" agreed the geologist. "I think we've done our best and we had better return to the ship. Perhaps we can venture a trip of exploration hither at some other time."

"It will have to be so," declared Frank.

"Be me sowl, I'm afther thinkin' we'll lose our way in this mist," said Barney, apprehensively.

"On, I think not," said Randall. "What if we fire signal guns? Perhaps those on board the Scorchers will hear us."

This suggestion seemed not a bad one. So, as they wandered on through the mist, Randall fired his rifle at intervals.

It was not long ere an answer came. It was a faint shot, and far in the distance.

But it was enough.

It indicated the fact that the Scorchers was not beyond hearing. Frank tried to locate the search-light's glare.

The sound of firing seemed to come from a point higher up the mountain side, and the adventurers accordingly kept on in that direction.

At intervals Randall fired his gun, and the answer came. But one fact impressed the trio curiously.

This was that the firing sounded more and more distant, though they were going as the sound guided them directly towards it.

The meaning of this it was not easy to understand.

Fainter and fainter grew the answering shots. Then Randall halted.

"We are certainly going in the wrong direction!" he declared. "Pretty quick we won't be able to hear those shots at all."

"You are right!" agreed Frank. "It must be that the mist transfers the sound to different points of the compass."

"Begorra, we kin go no furdher dis way anyhow!" cried Barney, who was a little in advance.

"How is that?" asked Frank.

"Shure, sor, there's a steep place here, and a big hole. Will yez have a look at it?"

Frank and Randall ran forward. At their feet yawned a deep abyss.

It was the crater.

They had climbed the cone to the very summit. There was little wonder that the sounds of firing had grown so faint.

CHAPTER XI.

A SERIOUS ACCIDENT.

FRANK NOW began to make more accurate calculations as to their exact position.

The result was that the party were soon scrambling down the mountain side and rapidly approaching the Scorchers, for the firing every moment grew more distinct.

Suddenly a dull glow was seen through the mist. Frank gave a cry of joy.

"That is the search light," he cried; "we shall soon be there!"

And his prediction was verified. After a hard scramble the Scorchers was reached.

All were glad of this.

The expedition around the range had been a failure. The fate of Captain Ward and his men remained unsolved.

But it was safe to assume that they had perished in the waters of the inland sea. All were agreed upon this point.

Frank examined the barometer with some alarm.

"I'm afraid," he said, "that if we do not make a move very quickly to return to the Pearl that we will never get there."

"That's correct, mate," declared Wendel; "I agree with ye. The winter storms will block the fiord. If the ship stands the nipping the spring thaw will carry her into the northward current and we shall never see her again."

"Enough!" cried Randall. "Why do we delay here then?"

"I fear to start in this deadly mist," replied Frank.

"We must risk it!"

A long and earnest consultation was held.

Of course there was no telling how long the mist would last. It might disappear in a few hours, it might not for a week.

However, it was finally decided to make the attempt.

The search-light was trimmed to its fullest power, and the Scorchers began to feel its way down the mountain side.

Mains and the three sailors rode on the deck, for there was not room for all in the cabin comfortably.

For hours the Scorchers made its uncertain way down the mountain to the plain and the pass which would take them into the fiord.

It was not an easy matter to thus fumble along in the darkness. There were innumerable perils.

But Frank kept the machine on its course as well as he could, and exercised all due caution.

At length the pass was reached.

Here the mist lessened and it was easier to see the way. The machine threaded its way through the defile with greater ease.

And when its end was reached, the plain and river extending to the ice belt lay clear of mist or cloud.

The storm was peculiar to the volcanic region alone. Frank was even enabled to dispense with the search-light.

A chill wind blew from the north, and the voyagers were obliged to wrap themselves up warmly. The machine ran along the banks of the river.

The spirits of all began to arise. Even the seamen on the Scorchers' deck were much lighter of spirit.

"If we only find the ship unharmed," cried Frank, "we will be able to find our way home yet."

Home!

The word seemed to have a magic charm to each one in the party. It was true that it had been a long time since they had seen it.

Indeed it had seemed at times as if they were doomed to spend their lives in this place. That it was to become their tomb.

But there was a chance of liberation and all looked forward hopefully.

Camp was made on the river banks. Barney and Pomp improved the opportunity to try fishing.

There were delicious trout in the clear waters and they rose readily to the fly.

They returned with a goodly mess, and it was an agreeable change from the stale food which they had been eating.

Down the river's course the Scorchers went until patches of ice and snow began to appear.

Soon they crossed the belt and were in the ice region.

It became necessary now to don their fur suits and prepare for the chill winds. Frost formed on the pilot house windows exceedingly thick.

The four seamen were ensconced in cramped quarters in the cabin, for they could not have existed outside. All preparations were made for a rough trip.

And this was what they had as events will prove.

Soon they were in the heart of the fiord and upon the surface of the river.

Here the first mishap befell them.

Barney was at the wheel and the Scorchers was gliding between two huge bergs of ice, when there was a crash and a sullen roar and one of them fell.

It struck the former trucks of the machine. There was a ripping, rending sound and then the machine pitched forward heavily.

Not a man but was thrown upon his face and all realized that the machine had met with a serious mishap.

Frank sprung out of the cabin door. He gave a cry of dismay at the sight before him.

There lay a heap of crushed material, the trucks and forward running gear of the machine. They were fearfully mixed up with the ice.

Here was catastrophe of no mild sort. Pallid and nerveless he was joined by the others.

"Gee whiz!" exclaimed Randall in dismay; "we're done for, Frank!"

"Begorra the masheen is spoilt intoirely!" wailed Barney.

For a moment Frank seemed utterly unable to act.

Then he walked slowly about the Scorchers. He examined the broken gear long and slowly.

Then he said:

"Barney and Pomp, bring out tools and help me clear away this debris."

The two jokers hastily obeyed.

Frank proceeded to disentangle the wreck. All went silently to work to help him.

The forward part of the Scorchers was set upon a support while Frank endeavored to repair the wheels. But presently he said:

"My friends, I am afraid we are badly stuck. These wheels can never do service again."

It was an ominous statement.

A groan went up simultaneously.

"Confound the luck!" cried Randall; "the fiends are after us! What is the next best thing we can do, Frank?"

"There is fortunately a way out of the difficulty," said the young inventor.

At this the faces of all brightened.

"As we are upon snow," continued Frank, "wheels are not a prime necessity. I think we can rig up a temporary sledge to go under the forward part of the machine and yet go ahead."

A cheer arose at this.

It was fortunate that the power of the Scorchers was connected with the hind wheels where the driving cogs were placed; therefore, the loss of the forward trucks did not interfere with the machinery or driving power.

Frank now set to work to rig up a sledge.

This it was not difficult to do with the remnants of the truck. In a few hours the machine was provided with sledge runners.

These worked clumsily and very seriously impeded the speed of the Scorchers. But they were better than nothing.

This accident was a bad one for the chances of the voyagers, and all felt secretly discouraged.

It seemed almost a certainty that the ship would be nipped before they could get to her. But Frank said:

"Don't give up yet. We have a good chance and we'll hang onto it."

Slowly the Scorchers now made its way down the fiord.

The days passed into weeks before finally the great headlands were seen, and all craned their necks for a sight of the ship.

But an immense barrier of ice had risen just off shore. It was fully two hundred feet high.

This showed that beyond a doubt the pack had been at work. There must have been terrific crowding and crushing to have raised this barrier.

What then might be the fate of the ship? Was she lying on her beam ends a crushed and worthless wreck? Or had she gone to the bottom?

It could hardly be believed that she had altogether escaped mishap. The adventurers were in a fever of anxiety.

It was frightfully cold. Nothing like it had ever been experienced by any one in the party.

No one dared to remain out on deck for long. He would have been converted into an icicle.

The machine was brought to a halt by the great wall of ice. The Scorchers could not surmount it nor did there seem any pass to go through.

What was to be done?

The party were all intensely anxious to get a look at the ship. There seemed but one way.

This was to leave the Scorchers and go forward on foot. This plan was discussed.

The cold by good fortune now began to moderate. It brought signs of snow, but it enabled the voyagers to go forth without the extreme peril of freezing to death.

A party was quickly made up to scale the icy heights. These were Randall, Frank Reade, Jr., Barney and Mains. They wrapped up as warmly as possible and set forth.

It was no light undertaking.

To climb that immense barrier, with its treacherous surface, with its hundreds of chasms and pitfalls, was a feat.

But they armed themselves with steel tipped poles and set forth. Soon they were clambering over the ice.

It was a rough and dangerous ascent. Before they had half made it, a startling thing happened.

Mains and Barney were in the lead. Suddenly and without warning they vanished.

There was a slight upheaval of the blocks of ice. Then they disappeared from view most effectually.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Randall; "did you see that, Frank?"

"I did," replied the young inventor.

"What does it mean?"

"It means that if we don't go to the aid of those chaps instantly, we may never see them again!"

They clambered furiously up to the spot where the two men had been, but not a trace of them could be found.

There were a few marks of the penstocks on the ice. But this was all. There was no visible pitfall or cavity.

What did it mean?

Of course they must have fallen into something of the sort. Their disappearance could be explained in no other way.

Frank placed his penstock under a corner of the huge block of ice. He was not able to lift it, but the penstock slipped down into a certain cavity beneath.

"Give me a hand, Randall," he said.

Together they tried to lift the block of ice. But it would not budge. Their strength was not adequate.

Frank was in a quandary.

He knew that his two colleagues were somewhere beneath that immovable block of ice which had fallen into just the position to close the cavity into which they had fallen.

How deep the pitfall was he had no means of guessing. He placed his ear to the crack and listened. No sound came up.

Various horrible possibilities occurred to Frank.

Suppose the cavity was so deep that it extended all the way down to the water, or was really in itself an air-hole? They would certainly go to the bottom of the sea.

In such a case they were beyond earthly aid. But Frank did not believe yet that such was the case.

He hoped to find both alive, though possibly unconscious at the bottom of the pit. But first of all it must be opened.

So he drew his hatchet from his belt and began work. Randall did the same.

Their purpose was to, if possible, split the big cake of ice and thus open up the trap. They worked hard and fast.

With rapid blows Frank quickly cut a deep channel into the ice block. Deeper it grew and Randall advanced to meet him.

Then one united blow cracked the ice block. They put their shoulders to it and hurled it down the slope.

CHAPTER XII.

WHICH IS THE END.

As they did so both nearly fell into the cavity. They clung to the edges desperately.

Then recovering they saw that a dark hole yawned beneath them. How deep it was they could only conjecture.

But Frank shouted:

"Hello! Are you down there, Barney?"

Again and again the hail went down. Then something like a gasp and a sob came up.

A voice muttered:

"Phwere the devil am I? Shure, it's kilt I am, an' this is Purgatory!"

"No, it isn't!" shouted Frank, "it's only a hole in the ice. Lively now, old fellow. How is the other fellow?"

"Misther Frank?" shouted Barney.

"Yes, it's me!"

"Shure, what's the matter!"

"Oh, you fell into a hole in the ice, that's all!"

"Och, shure, I remember now. An' the other feller—Mither av Moses! I belave he's dead!"

"Wait and I'll lower a rope to you," cried Frank. "Tie it around him and we'll haul him up!"

"All roight, sor!"

Frank had provided himself with a hundred feet of stout line before leaving the Scorchers. This now came into play.

He lowered it quickly into the pit. In a very few moments Barney gave an answering tug.

"All roight, sor! I have it fast!"

Then another voice was heard below. It was evident that Mains had also recovered his consciousness.

"It's a hard v'yage, shipmates!" mumbled the sailor, "fell clean from the maintop into the waist of the ship. Ugh! my back is broken!"

"Be off wid yez!" cried Barney. "Ye're wuth tin dead min already! Put this line undher yez arms!"

"All right!" asked Frank.

"Yis, sor! Pull away wid yez!"

Frank and Randall gave way at the line. Up from the depths came the limp form of Mains.

He was quite seriously shaken up and unable as yet to stand on his feet. But the air revived him.

Frank and Randall placed him on the ice at one side and then drew Barney up.

The Celt came up as lively as a cricket.

"Shure it's hard to spile a bad egg, or to kill an Oirishman!" he cried; "it's sorry I am fer the other man. Phwat will we do wid him, Misther Frakk?"

Frank hardly knew what to say to this question. But Mains answered it himself.

"Don't ye worry about me, mates! Go on up to the summit an' I'll wait here till ye come back."

"Will yez?" cried Barney.

"I will, only keep an eye out for ice holes. I hope ye'll sight the ship for it's sick to death I am of this region."

"Same here, bejabers!" cried the Celt.

So it was arranged that Mains should remain where he was until the others should return.

He was fixed in a comfortable position and the trio went on up the steep incline. No further mishap befell them.

They stood upon the highest pinnacle. With his night glass Frank scanned the ice fields.

Suddenly he gave a sharp exclamation.

"There she is!" he cried.

"I see her!" shouted Randall, at the same moment.

"She stands up well."

"She is not nipped yet."

"No—and—by Jove, she is in open water. The bay has not filled in yet, Frank."

This was seen to be the truth. It was a gratifying fact.

Frank's face wore a relieved expression.

"Then there is a chance for us," he cried. "We will do the best we can."

"Back to the Scorchers," cried Randall. "We must lose no time. There is snow in the air, and if it comes before we reach the ship it may spoil all our plans."

"You are right," agreed Frank. "Back to the Scorchers!"

Down the slippery ice hammocks they went. They found Mains where they had left him.

The sailor was upon his feet but he was not deemed strong enough to walk back to the Scorchers.

So Barney and Randall carried him between them, while Frank went ahead with the penstock to pick the way.

They were not long in descending to the level below. Those on board the Scorchers saw them coming and shouted joyfully.

It was good news which they learned when the three explorers went aboard. There was certainly a chance for them.

In the cabin of the Scorchers an elaborate discussion was held. The ship was in sight and it would be easy to reach her on foot.

But what of the Scorchers?

How could they hope to get the machine over that mighty ice barrier? It was a sheer impossibility.

The matter finally resolved itself into two alternatives.

One was to remain aboard the Scorchers until spring and the ice barrier should fall, and then trust to luck in getting aboard the Pearl before the northward current should take her.

Or, they might accept the dernier resort, and abandon the machine. Frank considered the matter for some while. He realized that the Scorchers had seen its best uses.

The destruction of its forward gear had shaken it up greatly, and it was hardly likely that it could be repaired to be of much further service.

The electric engines were valuable, but he could easily reproduce them. Frank did not like the idea of leaving his pet invention in the

Antarctic, but on the other hand he could not see any ready way to avoid it.

What should he do?

There were many valuable effects aboard. These could in the main be transported to the ship.

"Gentlemen," he said finally, "I have thought the matter over seriously. I believe it is a question of life or death with us.

"Life if we get away on that ship before the rigorous winter sets in. Death if we have to remain here nearly nine months until the northern channels open again.

"We are not bred to this climate. We could not stand the rigorous cold. We would perish. It is only the question of the Scorchers, and I have decided what to do."

"We will abandon the machine?"

There was a profound silence. Then Frank resumed:

"Life is of paramount importance. We will transport such of the Scorchers' effects as we can, and start at once for the Pearl."

Instantly a wild cheer went up. The sailors ran forward and embraced Frank as their deliverer.

No time was lost.

It was decided to take the electric gun, the search-light, and one of the smaller dynamos.

None of these were heavy. Also a case of the dynamite shells was taken. Other articles of necessity were carried away.

But all the stores, the rich equipment and luxuries of the Scorchers were left behind with it. They were never seen again.

To many Frank's course might have seemed heroic; but it was at least justifiable.

The long antarctic winter is against human life. As Frank had predicted few of the party would have lived to see the spring.

But the serious part of the undertaking was not over yet, by any means.

To climb the ice barrier with all their effects was no light task. Four trips were made over it.

But at length they were enabled to set out for the ship. Fortunately the weather yet held moderate.

But at any moment the grim, old tyrant of winter was apt to descend with pitiless, blasting breath and lock up every channel and basin of open water.

So our voyagers journeyed on without rest.

Luck was with them. They reached the ship and got aboard. The Pearl was anchored in the middle of the basin.

But the boat in which Captain Ward had come off was yet in a cleft in the ice. In it all were safely transported to the ship's deck.

The Pearl was found in good sea-worthy condition, and there was no reason so far as that went why she should not sail north at once.

But there was another reason.

The channel by which she had entered the basin was closed. Great ice blocks had wedged in and closed it.

Here was a dilemma.

It was fifty miles to the open sea. Doubtless the channel was open in places, but there were sufficient obstructions to hold the vessel back.

What was to be done?

The crew all looked dismayed.

It looked as if the Pearl must stay in the Antarctic after all. But at the last moment Frank Reade, Jr., came to the rescue.

He had not as yet, by any means overtaken his resources.

He gave quick and sharp orders.

"Bring the pneumatic gun forward," he commanded.

Two men brought the cylinder of steel and its pivotal carriage forward. It was quickly mounted in the bow.

The connections were made with the pneumatic chambers and the dynamos.

Then Frank placed a projectile in the breech. He trained the gun upon the blocked channel.

One moment he drew the sights; then he pressed the electric button. The effect was thrilling.

The shell struck fair in the midst of the ice blocks. There was a terrible crash—a sullen, thunderous roar.

Up into the air one hundred feet went a column of water and ice fragments. It was a marvelous spectacle.

The ship pitched and rocked violently. Then Frank sent another shell into the heap.

The ice jam gave way. For full five hundred yards the channel was open. A northward current moved the crushed ice rapidly away and in an hour's time the channel was clear as far as the eye could reach.

The Pearl sailed out into the channel amid the cheers of her crew.

In the fifty miles of circuitous sailing among the ice fields the electric gun did valiant service.

In due time the Pearl emerged into the open sea. She met fearful weather for the first week.

But she steadily and stanchly fought her way northward. Inch by inch it seemed, until at length she was in Cape Horn seas.

The rest was easy.

A week later she was in Montevideo harbor. Here a fresh crew was shipped and a new captain procured.

Then she proceeded to Rio and took on a cargo of coffee, so that her homeward cruise might not be unprofitable.

In due time she reached New York. Captain Ward's wife was inconsolable over his loss. The ship was sold and the sum given to her.

Frank also paid to her again the sum of the charter, which was a provision against want, and some recompense for her terrible loss. But nobody could deny but that Ward himself was solely to blame.

The seamen survivors of the party scattered when New York was reached. Jack Wendel returned to his seashore home, and Randall went on to Readstown with Frank and Barney and Pomp.

In a large measure the trip had been a success.

They had accomplished the feat of discovering the abandoned country, but neither Frank nor Randall were satisfied.

"I shall have another try at that game some day," declared the young inventor. "I want to explore the rest of that strange land."

"By all means take me with you?" asked Randall, eagerly.

"We will talk it over," replied Frank.

And full of the idea he went back to his work. Whether he ever carried out his project or not, we will wait for the future to tell, and with this announcement bring our story to

[THE END.]

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